

PROPOSED ADDITION TO THE "OFFICIAL LIST OF
SPECIFIC TRIVIAL NAMES IN ZOOLOGY" OF THE
TRIVIAL NAMES OF TWO SIBERIAN BIRDS

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The present application to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is concerned with the question of the trivial names properly applicable to two species of lark, each of which was originally described from Siberian material. The names and relevant synonyms of these species are as follows :—

Species "A"

Alauda yeltonensis Forster, 1767, *Phil. Trans.* **57** (2) : 350.

Tanagra sibirica Sparrrman, 1786, *Mus. carlson.* (1) : No. xix (et fig.).

Species "B"

Alauda sibirica Gmelin, 1789, in Linnaeus, *Syst. Nat.* (ed. 13) **1** (2) : 799.

Alauda leucoptera Pallas, 1811, *Zoogr. rosso-asiat.* **1** : 518, pl. 33.

2. The two species are considered to be congeneric, both being referred to the genus *Melanocorypha* Boie, 1828 (*Isis* (Oken) **1828** : 322). For many years the first of these species was known as *Melanocorypha yeltonensis* (Forster) and the second as *Melanocorypha sibirica* (Gmelin). About twenty years ago, however, Hartert & Steinbacher (1932, *Vög. pal. Fauna*, *Ergänzungsband* (1) : 103) discarded the trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin for species "B." on the ground that it was a secondary homonym of the trivial name *sibirica* Sparrrman, 1786, which, as shown above, is a junior synonym of *yeltonensis* Forster, 1767, the oldest available name for species "A." These authors thereupon applied the trivial name *leucoptera* Pallas, 1811, to species "B." Most recent authors have followed Hartert & Steinbacher in this matter and have used the trivial name *leucoptera* Pallas for species "B."

3. Doubts have been expressed as to the correctness of the action of these authors in rejecting the name *sibirica* Gmelin, having regard to the fact that the spelling of this name is not identical with that of the name (*sibirica* Sparrrman) for which it was rejected on the ground of secondary homonymy. In this connection it was pointed out, in particular, that the differences in spelling between these two names are not among the differences which the third paragraph of Article 35 prescribes are to be ignored in determining whether any given pair of trivial names are to be treated as being homonyms of one another.

4. If the considerations set forth above alone were relevant to this matter, the argument advanced above would be unanswerable, and there could be no doubt that, under the Rules, the practice of the last twenty years should be reversed and that species "B" should in future be known by the trivial name *sibirica* (Gmelin).

5. The foregoing argument does not however cover the whole of the field in a case of this kind, for it ignores the fact that, where we are concerned with two trivial names, each based upon the name of the same locality and differing from one another only in some small respect of spelling, the difference may be due to an error of orthography or of transcription or to a printers' error and therefore that Article 19 may apply to one of the names in question. In such a case the effect of applying Article 19 may be to make the two names identical with one another and thus to make them homonyms of one another. This clearly was a possibility which it was necessary to examine, for although I should not consider the present case of sufficient importance to justify the use by the Commission of its plenary powers for the sake of preserving the practice which has grown up since the publication of the volume by Hartert & Steinbacher (1932), it is equally important to avoid any action which would disturb that practice unless it was clear that this was necessary under a strict application of the Rules.

6. At this stage therefore I consulted my colleague, Mr. Francis Hemming, Secretary to the Commission, who has furnished to me the following Report (*in litt*, 6th May 1951):—

In approaching the question whether trivial names such as *sibirica* and *siberica* should, or should not, be treated as homonyms of one another, one cannot fail to be impressed by the fact that the late Charles D. Sherborn, the most learned bibliographer of his time, treated names spelt "*siberica*" as misspellings for "*sibirica*," listing both together under the latter spelling (1902. *Index Anim.*, Pars prima: 900). Although in the present case there was a strong presumption from the type localities of the two larks in question that the trivial names applied to these species by Sparman (1786) and Gmelin (1789) respectively were each intended to indicate the same locality and therefore that the difference in spelling between the two names did not indicate a difference in meaning, being a matter of orthography only, it seemed to me, on receiving your inquiry, that the first step to be taken should be to investigate the question of the meaning attaching to these words. I accordingly applied for advice to Professor Charles Singer, Professor Emeritus of the History of Science in the University of London, than whom, in my opinion, no more authoritative adviser could be found on a question of this kind. Professor Singer kindly undertook to consider this question and in due course furnished the following report: "The correct form of the adjective is undoubtedly 'sibir.' not 'siber.' Sibir was the name of a Tabar fort on the Irtysh which was captured by Cossacks in 1581. The name 'Siberia' was extended in the seventeenth century to the Muscovite dominions in the North-East. Thus, 'sibirica' is the proper adjective."

In view of Professor Singer's Report, it is clear that there was at no time any place named "Siber," as contrasted with the Tabar fort named "Sibir" and that, in view of the extension during the seventeenth century of the meaning attaching to the word "Siberia" (and thus, to the adjective "sibirica"), it must certainly be concluded that, where (as here) two species occurring in the portion of the Muscovite dominions known, in English, as "Siberia" are named respectively "*sibirica*" and "*siberica*," that difference in spelling is not due to any difference in the origin or meaning of the two trivial names in question but is attributable solely to difference in orthography. In the present case, Professor Singer has shown conclusively that the correct way of spelling the adjective in question is "*sibirica*" and not "*siberica*," thus endorsing the conclusion reached in this matter by Sherborn nearly fifty years ago, a conclusion which, it may be noted, no one in the intervening period has ever tried to dispute.

The problem with which we are confronted here has therefore nothing to do with the question whether these two larks have the same word as their trivial name: it is quite clear that they have. The question to be considered is whether the difference in spelling adopted for these two names is a legitimate difference (in which case the two names would not be homonyms of one another) or, being due to error of spelling in the case of one of the names, is an illegitimate difference and one which calls for action under Article 19. In my view, the information furnished by Professor Singer, taken in conjunction with the considerations advanced above, would make it quite impossible to sustain an argument that there is a legitimate difference between the correctly spelt adjective "*sibirica*" and the incorrectly spelt adjective "*siberica*." I conclude, therefore that, under the Rules, it is necessary to emend the defectively spelt trivial name "*siberica*" under Article 19, to "*sibirica*" before any consideration is given to the question of the relative status, for the purposes of the Law of Homonymy, of the trivial names published respectively by Sparman and Gmelin. Once the necessary emendation of Sparman's faultily spelt trivial name is made, we find that the name so emended is identical with the name later published by Gmelin.

It is evident therefore that Hartert & Steinbacher were perfectly correct when in 1932 they rejected the trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin, 1789, as being, within the genus *Melanocorypha* Boie, a junior secondary homonym of the trivial name *sibirica* (emend. of *siberica*) Sparman, 1787. A name once validly rejected in this way as a junior secondary homonym cannot, as we know, ever again be used for the species to which it was originally given. Accordingly, ever since the publication in 1932 of Hartert's and Steinbacher's volume, the trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin has been a dead homonym, incapable in any circumstances of being brought back to life again. Since, as those authors pointed out—and as you confirm—the next name to be given to the species to which in 1789 Gmelin gave the invalid name *Alauda sibirica* was the name *Alauda leucoptera* Pallas, 1811, it follows that the oldest available trivial name, and therefore the valid trivial name for the species in question is *leucoptera* Pallas, the name by which that species is currently known.

7. In the circumstances it is clear that it would not be in accordance with the Rules to resuscitate the trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin for the species which for the last twenty years has been known by the trivial name *leucoptera* Pallas. Now that the position in this matter is clearly established, it is desirable that, in order to prevent any subsequent argument on the subject, the oldest available trivial names for each of these larks should be placed on the *Official List*, the invalid trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin being at the same time placed on the *Official Index*. I accordingly ask the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature:—

(1) to place the under-mentioned trivial names on the *Official List of Specific Trivial Names in Zoology*;—

(a) *yeltonensis* Forster, 1767 (as published in the binominal combination *Alauda yeltonensis*);

(b) *leucoptera* Pallas, 1811 (as published in the binominal combination *Alauda leucoptera*);

(2) to place the trivial name *sibirica* Gmelin, 1789 (as published in the binominal combination *Alauda sibirica*) (the trivial name of a rejected junior secondary homonym in the genus *Melanocorypha* Boie, 1828) on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Trivial Names in Zoology*.